

Action Plan

for the

Nairobi Slums



[le Monde 2006]

By

Lance Winslow
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Chapter I

The Challenges of The Nairobi Slums



[Getty Images/AFP/Marco Longaro] [Practical Solutions Organization]

The challenges of the Nairobi slums are not going away. Sending in good money after bad will not solve any of the problems there. As the estimated population in these slums grows to well over 2 million there will be more mouths to feed, more trash piled up, more sewage, more disease and less water. Currently the growth of these slums is a huge issue, although HIV/AIDS is taking a serious dent out of the total number, somewhat slowing the growth.

Kibera Slum, Nairobi Kenya

The largest slum in Nairobi, Kenya is called Kibera and has over 800,000 inhabitants. The roads or pathways are littered with animal waste, garbage and human waste. Although most of the children do not wear shoes the roads often have jagged rocks. Many travelers come to visit Kibera and "Slum Tourism" is getting popular, still no major improvements to the area have been done despite the popular topic in the media. Humanitarian band-aids are helpful, but not enough.



[Private Tourist Photo 2004]

Recently the rents were raised there and it became a political hot topic leading to severe violence, fires, protests and riots. Most feared for their lives. The sewage runoff from the Kibera slums runs into the already highly polluted Nairobi River, which is used downstream for people washing their clothes. Still even worse most of the landlords of the slum (60%) are government officers or politicians, corruption is another huge issue. [UN Human Settlement Programme (UN Habitat) Study].

Kibera means "forest" but it seems the city officials of Nairobi are having a hard time seeing the forest for the slum. Not long ago, The Kibera Urban Environment and Sanitation Master Plan was introduced even so the problems run much deeper than the proposed measures and it appears

to have been more political window dressing. The Kibera Slum, golf course adjacent, is not the only shanty town in Nairobi, just the largest. One other shanty town in Nairobi, "Korogocho" got street lighting after a huge vocal firestorm to prevent civil unrest, so much more is needed.

The sanitary situation in Nairobi's shanty-towns and slums causing serious health issues such as;

- Skin Disease
- Worm Infestation
- Typhoid

Due to the altitude and temperature Malaria is not as bad as other parts of the Nation, but Climate Change promises to change all that. Volunteer health clinic workers say that over 50% of the problems they see are hygiene related. One huge problem has been that poor folks with no jobs cannot afford to pay for some of the open pit latrines and instead hold it until night time and defecate into a plastic bag and throw it into the street or on a neighbor's roof. They call these "Flying Toilets" and unfortunately nearly all the roofs leak or are in a state of disrepair.



[UCBM file photo]

Today over one billion people live in Urban Slums on Earth and that number is rising at an alarming rate. Kibera in Nairobi is merely one humanitarian crisis and there are many more like it Africa, Asia, South America and Indonesia. Africa had an estimated 14 million orphan children of HIV/AIDS victims and that was a figure from 2001, some believe the number now is nearly double if not triple today. Even without the AIDS crisis, 32.5% of the Earth's human population lives in Urban Slum areas with very similar living conditions.

Is It Really That Bad?

Indeed, it is worse than that. What is being done? Well, there have been many "total plans" floated, but none have worked because they do not address the real issues. One large project built Low income housing multi-story buildings, but the people of the slums do not want to live there. Carrying water up stairs was another factor. As soon as they were built many who were eligible, sub-let the rooms or used them to shelter animals. Worthy cause, nice attempt, but it turned out to have been a complete waste.

There are people, literally Angels or Mother Teresa Types working with the slum communities from the inside, but they are overwhelmed with the HIV/AIDS victims, orphan children, disease, starvation and sanitation issues. And without such basic necessities as;

- Trash and Rubbish Pick-up
- Running Water
- Electricity and Power
- Sewer Hook-ups
- Shelter from Weather (marginal roofing, repairs)
- Fire Fighters or Fire Stations
- Police other than Neighborhood Watch

These extraordinary folks just cannot keep up and those in need are growing in numbers, dying of HIV/AIDS or have no way to support themselves. The filth taxes even the strongest with the most robust immune systems; 15% die before age 5. Many young girls take to the streets to make extra money to eat and risk getting HIV/AIDS and their chances are not very good. 26% will be sexually abused by age 14 and most start their sexual promiscuity between ages 9-12.

The Unthinkable Solutions

If we really look at the slums of the World in places like Africa, Haiti, Palestine, India, China, Indonesia, South Africa, South Asia and Central America much of the problems are indeed similar in nature. Is there a solution or is the solution so horrific to consider that no one will talk about it, such as;

- Do Nothing at all
- Sterilizing humans
- Eliminating people
- Bulldozing the slums
- Paving over the slums
- Burning the slums down
- Kicking all the people out
- Moving them to another location
- Allowing HIV/AIDS to Kill the People

The aid that the first world citizens send is more about allowing donors to satisfy themselves so they can feel that they are doing something, yet in reality often they are making the problems worse. Many times the money and aid never even makes it to the people that really need the help. Of course you cannot tell them that or they get hostile and even accuse you of having no empathy. Throwing good money after bad is a silly waste and although the cause and calling are noble, the ends fall far short.

People do not like to hear these things, but this is the reality. Removing someone's suffering for or month or a year might be nice, but in the end they go back to the same old life. It often, crueler to show someone something they can never have than to help them in their own chosen environment or the slums where they live? Straight out giving also inhibits self-reliance.

To fix these issues responsibility must be placed back onto those slum communities to solve their own problems for themselves from within. But first, these slums need basic infrastructure;

- Water
- Sewer
- Schools
- Paved roads
- Street Lights
- Trash pick-up
- Health Centers
- Security or Police
- Local Government

These are the very basics, as a starting place. But how can you fix an area that has 2 million plus (estimated) and growing, where HIV/AIDS is running rampant? It will take some brave people to make the challenges to be met. It appears that once the basic infrastructures are completed most of the major challenges will be met and then the HIV/AIDS issues can be tackled.

In considering all this there seems to be 150 to 220 different shanty towns or slums in Nairobi depending on your method of counting and it makes sense to put a deadline on the project to revitalize the areas; less than a decade should be the goal; that will mean 15 to 22 slums per year.

Now then, such a project is obviously easier said than done because each of these slums consists of 10s of thousands, if not 100s of thousands of people. Although 60% of Nairobi's population lives in Urban Slums these shanty-town inhabitants only occupy 5% of the land area of the city.

Chapter II

The Plan of Attack

Where Do We Start?

To start such a massive undertaking we need to consider a grid plan of attack and it must be done in sections. Although slums of Nairobi are all around the city, they do not completely surround it, as they are checkered throughout. They are sprawling they, not a perfect circle. Nevertheless to visualize this action plan concept think of a clock and each phase will be a slice of the pie. These areas must be bulldozed and people will have to leave temporarily and indeed also employed to work to build their section or other sections of the slums during re-vitalization.

Obviously the first step is to build a massive sewer treatment plant at the lowest point of the area and it will need its own source of power or hook to the city grid. Sub-sewer treatment plants or pre-treatment plants will be needed in smaller slums at their lowest points. This will take huge funding and industrial talent and should not be compromised by political corruption.

The second step that must take place is the cleanup and the trash removed to four new separate landfills which will be built as the project progresses. People will be employed to remove trash and work 3 to 4 hour shifts with push carts and this operation will go on 24-hours a day in each section which is planned to be next.

Others slums can also remove trash if they set up teams to do this on their own; the project will also fund the labor as part of the project. By paying them for each load delivered they will find the trash and bring it to the land fill in bulk. There is already one very organized Youth Organization doing this, The Kibera Youth Help Group using the slogan "Trash is Cash" and this model can be expanded with their assistance. [see www.Kibera.net "Youth Link"]

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